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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this guide is to: (1) point out those differences between Black Tai and English which will cause difficulties for the Black Tai-speaking students of English, and (2) outline the most effective ways of helping the student overcome these difficulties. The first section is a contrastive analysis of the phonologies of Black Tai and English, presented in three parts: (1) sounds which occur in similar patterns in both languages, (2) sounds which occur in English but not in Black Tai, and (3) sounds which pattern differently in Black Tai and English. A note on intonation follows this analysis. The guide ends with suggestions and advice about how to teach English pronunciation. This includes suggestions for class preparation and for the adaptation of existing ESL materials. (Author/TL)

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GENERAL INFORMATION SERIES: Teaching English Pronunciation to Speakers of Black Tai (Tai Dam)

Introduction

People learning to speak a foreign language make "mistakes" in pronunciation which can nearly always be accounted for as carry-overs from their native languages: no two languages have the same sound systems, or phonologies, and the features of the phonology of one's first language tend to be carried over into one's pronunciation of the second. This is why there is an easily recognizable difference between, say, a French "accent" and a German "accent" in English; the French "accent" consists of features of the phonology of French carried over into the Frenchman's pronunciation of English, and the German "accent" consists of features of the phonology of German carried over into the German's pronunciation of English. Foreign "accents", if they do not hamper communication, are interesting and quite pleasant -- consider, for example, Maurice Chevalier or Sophia Loren -- but if they hamper communication they can be a real handicap.

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Teachers of English to foreigners must therefore see to it that their students learn to pronounce English well enough that they can be readily and immediately understood. At first glance, this might seem an impossible job, especially if the students have already learned some English but do not pronounce it well. It is possible, however, to focus on particular pronunciation problems, and to deal with these problems one at a time, so that eventually the student's pronunciation as a whole is improved.

As we mentioned before, pronunciation difficulties are almost always directly correlated with differences in the phonologies of the native language and the language to be learned. By comparing the languages, the teacher can predict precisely those sounds that the student will find difficult, and can then direct

his efforts towards teaching those in a methodical way, rather than attempting to deal with the student's pronunciation as a whole. It is not necessary to speak the student's language to compare it with English; simply knowing that, for example, the student's language does not have b's at the ends of words is sufficient for the teacher to predict that the student will have trouble pronouncing the b in words like tub, drab, or Bob.

The purpose of this bulletin is to point out the differences between Black Tai and English which will cause difficulties for the Black Tai-speaking students of English, and to outline the most effective ways of helping the student overcome these difficulties. The speakers of Black Tai call themselves and their language tai dam. We will use the more widely known designation, Black Tai.

Contrasting Black Tai and English

In comparing the phonologies of Black Tai and English, we are concerned with three groups of sounds: first, those which occur in similar patterns in both languages; second, those which occur in English but not in Black Tai; and third, those sounds which occur in both languages but pattern differently. (Sounds which occur in Black Tai, but not in English, are irrelevant to the Black Tai-speaking learner of English, although of course they are very relevant to the English-speaking learner of Black Tai.)

The reader is cautioned here that we are talking about sounds, and not letters of the alphabet. While some Black Tai spelling systems represent a certain sound with the letters th, for example, that sound is not the same as the sounds that are spelled in English as th. To avoid confusion, we will, when necessary, give examples of the sounds we are dealing with, e.g. "th as in 'either'".

1. Sounds which occur in similar patterns in both languages.

These are sounds with which the Black Tai-speaking learner will have no difficulty. He will use his counterpart Black Tai sound, which will be either exactly like the English sound, or close enough to be readily understood. The following English sounds fall into this category:

m as in 'men'

n as in 'no'

ng as in 'song' (note that ng is not a sequence of sounds, but a single sound, in both Black Tai and English)

t as in 'time'

p as in 'pet'

k as in 'cake'

y as in 'yes'

h as in 'how'

a as in 'bat' (although some speakers of Black Tai may make this sound with their mouth more closed than speakers of English do, so that it may sound closer to e as in 'bet')

ee as in 'beet'

ay as in 'play'

uh as in 'above'

oo as in 'boot'

oh as in 'boat'

au as in 'caught'

ah as in 'father'

i as in 'bright'

ow as in 'how'

oy as in 'boy'

2. Sounds which occur in English but not in Black Tai.

These are sounds which will give the Black Tai-speaking learner of English the most trouble. He will mistake them for the closest Black Tai or English equivalent and pronounce them accordingly, so he must be directly taught to distinguish them from other sounds, then to pronounce them properly. These sounds are listed below, together with the English sounds they may be confused with:

Sound:	May be confused with:
th as in 'ether'	t as in 'toad' or s as in 'see'
th as in 'either'	d as in 'dog' (or z as in 'zero' for some speakers)
g as in 'gay'	k as in 'king'
j as in 'gin'	ch as in 'chin'
z as in 'zero'	s as in 'sin'

Sound:	May be confused with:
zh as in 'pleasure'	s as in 'sin' (or z as in 'zero' for some speakers)
r as in 'red'	l as in 'lead' or w as in 'window'
i as in 'bit'	ee as in 'beet'
e as in 'bet'	ay as in 'bait'
oo as in 'book'	oo as in 'boot' or uh as in 'above'

3. Sounds which pattern differently in Black Tai and English.

The sounds of Black Tai and English, like the sounds in all other languages, occur in patterns: some sounds occur in clusters, others don't, some occur initially (at the beginnings of words), others occur only finally (at the ends of words), and so on. As might be expected, the sound patterns of Black Tai and English are often different; this means, among other things, that there are sounds which occur in both languages, but which pattern differently. Unless the Black Tai learner of English is taught the English patterns for these sounds, he will transfer the Black Tai patterns onto his English, with often un-understandable results.

One area in which the consonants of Black Tai and English pattern differently is in their occurrence in final position. Relatively few consonants occur in final position in Black Tai. All the English consonants except h, however, do occur finally. Some of these will, for a variety of reasons, cause no major problems (like final -b); others will. The consonants which occur finally in English but not Black Tai are listed below, along with the sounds they may be confused with. (Remember that these sounds are problematic in final position only.)

English final consonants	Likely to be confused with:
-b as in 'dab'	-p
-d as in 'bad'	-t
-f as in 'laugh'	-p
-v as in 'love'	-b or -p
-s as in 'bass'	-sh 'push'

English final consonants	Likely to be confused with:
-sh as in 'rush'	-s
-ch as in 'much'	-sh 'push' or -s
-l as in 'pill'	-n 'pin'

Another problem of patterning exists with words which start with t- and k- in English, like kind, tail, and so on. Some Black Tai initial t's and all initial k's are unaspirated (and the Black Tai speaker will un-aspirate initial p, also, when he learns to pronounce it), whereas English initial t's and k's are aspirated; in other words, the English initial t- or k- is pronounced with a slight puff of air following it (which you can feel if you hold the back of your hand up to your mouth and say kind, tall, or just t or k). In Black Tai t- or k- in initial position is pronounced without the puff of air. (English has unaspirated p, t, and k, but not in initial position.) To American ears, initial unaspirated t sounds like d, and unaspirated initial k sounds like g, so it is necessary to teach the Black Tai speaker learning English to aspirate his initial p's, t's and k's in English.

Take heart: these patterns problems are far, far easier to correct than they are to read about.

Black Tai has no consonant clusters (i.e. sequences of consonants in words). English, on the other hand, does -- initially in words ('pray', 'try', 'cry', 'please', 'clean', 'strike', thread', and so on), medially ('basket', cluster', 'badly', footnote', 'unlike', and so on), and finally ('told,' 'sixth', 'sent', 'length', 'vowels', and so on). This difference in patterning results in the Black Tai-speaking student's having difficulty pronouncing consonants in sequence, over and above the difficulties he might have in pronouncing the consonants by themselves. Since there are so many consonant clusters in English, this is probably the most immediately noticeable difficulty Black Tai-speaking learners of English will have. They will try to "break up" a consonant cluster by inserting a vowel between the consonants (saying, for example, "suhtop" for "stop", etc.), or simply by dropping the second or third consonant (saying, for example, "tol" for "told", etc.)

Final consonant clusters involve grammatical problems in addition to phonological ones. The English plural ('book - books'), possessive ('John - John's'),

third person singular ('I bite - he bites'), and the past tense ('talk - talked') are all formed by adding s, z, t or d to the ends of words, thereby creating final consonant clusters. The speaker of Black Tai learning English will have difficulty with the consonant clusters because Black Tai does not have clusters, and he will thereby have difficulty remembering to put the plural, past tense, third person singular or possessive endings onto the words. This means that his English teacher must pay special attention to the following final clusters:

-bd as in 'rubbed'
-gd as in 'tugged'
-vd as in 'loved'
-thd as in 'breathed'
-zd as in 'buzzed'
-jd as in 'judged'
-md as in 'bombed'
-nd as in 'banned'
-ngd as in 'banged'
-bz as in 'rubs'
-gz as in 'bags'
-vz as in 'loves'
-thz as in 'breathes'
-mz as in 'frames'
-nz as in 'bans'
-ngz as in 'bangs'
-lz as in 'bills'
-rz as in 'bars'
-ld as in 'boiled'
-rd as in 'barred'
-pt as in 'rapped'
-kt as in 'packed'
-ft as in 'laughed'
-tht as in 'frothed'
-st as in 'passed'
-cht as in 'watched'
-ps as in 'raps'
-ts as in 'bats'
-ks as in 'books'
-fs as in 'staffs'
-ths as in 'baths'

Intonation

Black Tai, like Chinese, is a tone language: every word has associated with it a particular "tone of voice"; if a speaker does not pronounce the correct tone for a word, he either mispronounces the word, or pronounces another word entirely. English has "tones", too (called intonation patterns), but they are associated with whole sentences, and not with single words. (The difference in meaning between the sentence "He's a doctor." and the question "He's a doctor?" is carried solely by the different intonation patterns.) Black Tai speakers who are students of English must be taught to associate tones with sentences, and not words, and they must be taught the important intonation patterns directly; the most commonly-occurring of these are:

Sentence-intonation: "He's a doctor." (Heavy stress on doctor; voice pitch goes down at the end of the sentence.)

Yes-no question intonation: "Is he a doctor?" (Heavy stress on doctor; voice pitch goes up at the end of the sentence.)

Wh- question intonation: "What does he do?" (Heavy stress on <u>do</u>; voice pitch goes down at the end of the sentence.)

There are, of course, intonation patterns associated with sentences in Black Tai, but not enough is known about them and their interaction with the Black Tai tones. At any rate, the speaker of Black Tai learning English must be taught to focus on sentence intonation in English, or he will confuse himself looking for tones that aren't there.

Pronunciation Problems for Black Tai Speakers Learning English

Sound	In _____ position	Why a problem
g 'gay'	all	non-existent in Black Tai
r 'red'	all	"
zh 'pleasure'	all	"
j 'gin'	all	"
th 'ether'	all	"
th 'either'	all	"
i 'bit'	all	"
e 'bet'	all	"
oo 'book'	all	"
b 'Bob'	final	does not occur finally in Black Tai
d 'dad'	final	"
l 'pill'	final	"
s 'bass'	final	"
z 'jazz'	final	"
sh 'push'	final	"
ch 'much'	final	"
f 'enough'	final	"
v 'love'	final	"
p 'pit'	initial	sounds like b to Americans
t 'take'	initial	" d "
k 'cake'	initial	" g "

consonant clusters like s<u>p</u>-, s<u>k</u>-, k<u>r</u>-, etc.	all	Black Tai does not have consonant clusters; Black Tai speakers will insert vowels ('<u>si</u>pell' for 'spell', etc.), or drop one of the consonants ('<u>sle</u>p' for '<u>slept</u>', etc.)
sentence intonation	declarative sentences	Black Tai sentence intonation is different
yes-no question intonation	questions which can be answered by 'yes' or 'no'	"
wh-word question intonation	questions which begin with 'who', 'which', 'what', 'how', etc.	"

How to teach English pronunciation

It will undoubtedly have occurred to you that the differences between Black Tai and English are considerable. They are, as languages go, about as different phonologically as they can get, and teaching the pronunciation of one to a speaker of the other is no mean feat.

As an American teacher of a Black Tai-speaking student, however, you have several factors working in your favor.

The primary advantage that you have is that your student is highly motivated to learn English. Not only is the language necessary to him for day-to-day existence, but he is also pressured, as we all are, by the need to conform, and conforming means speaking English. This motivation will keep the student going long after he -- and you -- have become exhausted on other grounds, and in rare cases will be sufficient for him to learn English without any formal training at all.

A second advantage is that the student is surrounded by accurately-pronounced English. (We are not talking here of 'correct' in the grammar-book sense; we are saying that all American speakers of English pronounce English vowels properly, and so on.) Every time the speaker of Black Tai turns on the radio or television in his house, or buys a shirt, or gets on a bus, he is bombarded with perfect examples of the language.

Another advantage you have is that you are, by definition, a native speaker for your student to imitate. Whether you speak Texas English or California English or New York English or Illinois English, you are a native speaker of English; if your student winds up speaking exactly like you do, he will sound like a native speaker too -- which is your pie-in-the-sky goal in the first place.

Yet another advantage you have is that your student will more than likely have had some exposure -- either formal or informal -- to other languages, and might very well have learned to pronounce many of the sounds which were presented above as problem sounds. If your student knows some French, for example, he will not have so much trouble with initial consonant clusters and final

consonants, because he will have had to tackle them in learning French. (Sometimes other factors besides previous exposure to language works for you; you never know, for example, what sounds your student made as a toddler, adding sound effects to his toys!)

Even not being able to speak Black Tai is a factor which can operate in your favor. You will find that very, very quickly -- within the first fifteen minutes of your first class with your student -- you can establish by gestures enough vocabulary (listen, repeat, all together, and so on) to carry you through until your student can understand more complicated instructions in English; so you are not really handicapped by the inability to give your students explanations in Black Tai. On the other hand, your student has to use English with you -- he can't slip back into Black Tai when the going gets rough -- and this serves as additional motivation for him to learn.

With so many factors operating to your advantage, teaching pronunciation is by no means the formidable job it appears to be.

Teaching problem sounds

We mentioned earlier that the problem sounds are those which do not occur in Black Tai, or which pattern differently in Black Tai and English. The way to teach these sounds is to tackle them one by one, first teaching the student to distinguish them aurally from phonetically similar sounds, then teaching him how to pronounce them.

Say, for example, that you want to work on the g sound as in get, a sound which does not exist in Black Tai and therefore will be difficult for the student. According to the list on page 3, g is likely to be confused with k. The first thing you do is make sure the student has the problem: ask him to pronounce the following words after you:

cot	coat	clock	dicker
got	goat	clog	digger

(These words are minimal pairs, which are pairs of words which differ in one

sound only: the only difference between coat and goat, for example, is that coat starts with the k sound, and goat starts with a g sound.) If your student pronounces these the same (saying coat - coat in response to your coat - goat), he probably cannot hear the difference between them, and therefore has to be taught the contrast between k and g.

You can teach your student to recognize the k - g contrast in a number of ways. One way is to make up a set of flash-card pictures for several of the minimal pairs (a picture of, say, a coat and one of a goat): hold up the coat picture and say coat, hold up the goat picture and say goat, etc.; then hold up the coat picture and say goat, indicating that it's wrong, and so on. Another way is to pronounce such pairs as coat - goat, coat - coat, goat - goat, goat - coat, and have your students judge the words as same or different. Anything you can dream up in the way of games utilizing the k - g contrast -- adaptations of Simon Says, or Scissors-Paper-Rock, for example -- will do just fine.

Do not, however, utilize the differences in spelling at this stage. The student's most immediate need is to understand and produce spoken English, so he must be taught to rely on his ears and tongue alone. It is a good idea to establish the English sound system first, and then introduce the alphabet. (If your student studied English in Vietnam or Laos, he will undoubtedly be able to read much, much better than he can speak; you will almost have to take pencil and paper away from him to get him to concentrate on listening and speaking.)

Once your student can hear the difference between k and g, he is ready to learn how to pronounce g. If you haven't had training in phonetics, you can rely here on getting the student to imitate your pronunciation of g as closely as possible. (In fact, even if you have had training in phonetics, you rely on imitation!) You should be fussy here, and make sure the student sounds exactly like you before you go on to the next step. Ask him to repeat after you several words with g; your list should include words in which g is initial, medial or final with different vowels, e.g.:

game	got	bag	bargain
guide	gun	brogue	boggle
gear	dog	league	bogus
get	beg	hug	haggle
goat	big	bagel	eager

(Your student will probably not be able to pronounce some of the other sounds in the word correctly; let these go for the moment, and concentrate on his pronunciation of g.)

When he can pronounce these g's, you can go on to teach him to contrast k and g. (You might have to work on his pronunciation of initial k before you work on the k - g contrast; proceed as for g.) Ask him to repeat after you the minimal pairs you started out with, and make sure he makes a contrast between the k's and g's.

The final step is to contrast k and g in sentences like

I saw the goat.
I saw the coat.

The dog is wet.
The dock is wet.

Treat all the problem sounds the same way as described for g, working first through the single sounds which don't occur in English. Then work on the sounds which pattern differently in Black Tai and English; proceed as for g, but work only on the occurrences of the sounds that cause problems. (It is not necessary, for example, to work on initial s, but very necessary to work on final s.) After that, work on sounds in clusters.

Preparation

Teacher preparation for pronunciation lessons is largely a matter of thinking up minimal pairs for the sound or sounds to be taught. A rhyming dictionary is helpful here, as well as a regular dictionary. In addition, there are numerous books on teaching English pronunciation; they invariably include lists of minimal pairs, as well as information on articulatory phonetics for those interested.

Classes

The size of your classes will, of course, vary with your circumstances, but the maximum number for really efficient, effective teaching of pronunciation is about fifteen students. To save time, a fair amount of pronunciation drill should be conducted chorally, i.e., with the class responding in unison; if classes are kept small, it is possible for the teacher to spot mistakes made by individual students during choral drills. It is also possible, if classes are small, for the teacher to check the performance of individual students, in turn, throughout the class period; if the class is large, however, he cannot do this without losing his students' interest.

It should be pointed out that learning pronunciation is very hard physical work, and that the student will tire long before the teacher, especially in very small classes or tutoring situations. It should also be pointed out that while the material might not be very interesting to the teacher, the student will by no means share his boredom; even the student who has had years of English in his schools at home will be very weak in oral and aural skills, and therefore in great need of pronunciation practice.

Student progress

Do not expect the student, once he has been taught, say, to pronounce g correctly, to ever after pronounce g correctly; he will need to be reminded again and again, and even then will slip when he is tired, distracted, or concentrating more on what he is saying than how he is saying it. The habits of his native language are deeply ingrained, and it takes weeks of practice to establish other habits counter to them.

As the student's teacher, you will get used to his pronunciation, and be able to understand him better and better as time goes on. You will have a natural tendency to think that it's his pronunciation that's improving, and not your understanding. To counteract this, check, from time to time, on his ability to be understood by people who don't know him.

How to adapt existing ESL materials

In general, you are well off using established ESL texts like those put out by the major publishers to teach pronunciation to speakers of Black Tai. These texts are carefully planned; they are written by specialists; they are tested in real teaching situations; they are widely available and usually relatively inexpensive; and there is such a wide range of them that it is possible to choose a text which suits your students' needs exactly. (Look in the preface of a book for an explanation of the age and English ability of the students the book is aimed at.) Most important, most of these texts have Teachers' Manuals which are invaluable to the inexperienced ESL teacher.

Nearly all of the established texts are designed so that they can be used effectively regardless of the native language of the student. They accomplish this by dealing directly with all the possible problem areas of English, with the understanding that the teacher will go quickly over those lessons the students find easy, and concentrate on those lessons the students find hard. Adapting one of these texts for Black Tai-speaking students is simply a matter of going through the lessons, identifying those which deal with problem areas for Black Tai speakers, and amplifying them with additional material if necessary. Using the earlier charts, for example, you would go through the pronunciation material in the text you are using, marking those lessons which deal with the pronunciation of g, the th's, and so on. You know beforehand that these are the lessons you will have to spend lots of time on, so you plan class time accordingly. Also make sure that the exercises in the book are extensive enough; check, for example, to see that there are exercises in which final -t and final -d are contrasted, as you know from the charts that these sounds are problematic in final position.

If you feel that the exercises in the book aren't thorough enough, work up (or acquire from other sources) additional ones. If there are no exercises on the contrast between final -t and final -d, for example, either make up a list of minimal pairs like tat - tad, spite - spied, etc., or use the minimal pairs given in a book like Pronunciation Contrasts in English. Then, use these minimal pairs to form additional exercises.

It's a good idea to go at least once over all the pronunciation materials in the book, even if some of them deal with non-problem areas. First, the material in these texts is carefully organized so that pronunciation materials are coordinated with grammar; often, then, the pronunciation exercises drill the grammar as well. Also, both you and your students will find it encouraging to work on something easy, for a change. And, there are times when students will stumble like mad over a contrast they aren't supposed to have difficulty with; running quickly through a particular pronunciation exercise, then, can also act as insurance against missing unexpected difficulties.

References

The following books are a sampling of materials that you will find useful:

Bowen, J. Donald. Patterns of English Pronunciation. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1975. $5.95.

Brand-new; available September 15, 1975. For any level students, a graded presentation of the sounds of English, first individually, then in combinations. Lots of exercises, usable transcription system.

Finocchiaro, Mary. English as a Second Language: From Theory to Practice. New York: Regents, 1974. $3.25. Paperback.

Newly revised practical guide to curriculum planning, lesson planning, adaptation of materials and language testing. Discusses specific techniques for teaching pronunciation, grammar, reading and writing. Appendix contains useful definitions, an extensive bibliography.

Nilsen, Don L.F., and Alleen Pace Nilsen. Pronunciation Contrasts in English. New York: Regents Publishing Co., 1973.

This is a collection of lists of minimal pairs, with each list labeled for languages in which the contrast doesn't exist. The labelings are more or less accurate for Black Tai, and the minimal pairs are subdivided into initial, medial and final position when relevant. The introduction gives a briefing on phonetics, some sample exercises, and instructions on how to use the book.

Stevick, Earl W. Helping People Learn English. New York: Abingdon Press, 1957.

This is a small, down-to-earth, sane, sensible book which is expressly designed to acquaint the non-experienced native speaker of English with the ins and outs of teaching English as a second language. It gives general guidelines on teaching pronunciation, and an easy-to-understand introduction to the mechanics of pronunciation. The sections on teaching grammar are equally good.